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Nixon Pardon Defeated Ford, Betty Says in Magazine Story

NEW YORK, Oct. 16 (AP)—Gerald Ford's pardon of former President Richard Nixon was largely responsible for Ford's loss in the 1976 presidential election, says former First Lady Betty Ford. But she doesn't think the pardon was a mistake.

"Many people who definitely were for Jerry could not bring themsleves to vote for him because he pardoned Nixon," Mrs. Ford is quoted as saying in the November issue of McCall's magazine.

"I don't don't think they realized what a sick man Nixon was . . . physically sick, which tended to affect . . . decisions."

Mrs. Ford said the media was more critical of her husband than it is of President Carter, but she said she is not resentful of that.

"Jerry was a Republican, and he was associated with Nixon—and anyone associated with Nixon was automatically,a 'bad guy.' "

She said Rosalynn Carter, the current first lady, "is doing a very good job," especially in view of the fact that "she's had her hands full to a great extent with all that family."

Mrs. Ford, 59, noted one striking difference between herself and Mrs. Carter when the women first met several years ago: "She signed her name 'Mrs. Jimmy Carter,' whereas I always signed, 'Betty Ford' . . . Of course, that was such a well-planned campaign—four years in the making—and I'm sure she used 'Mrs. Jimmy Carter' to promote her husband, and I think that was wonderful."

In the White House, Mrs. Ford said, Mrs. Carter is less outspoken than Mrs. Ford was, and, "She probably keeps her husband out of a lot of trouble, which I didn't."

Mrs. Ford currently is working on an autobiography and is preparing for several NBC-TV network appearances. She said her daughter, Susan, has quit school for a career in free-lance photography.

Son Jack works for Outside magazine and, although he has denied interest in a political career, Mrs. Ford said she believes he'll run for Congress eventually.

The Fords' only married son, Mike, and his wife, Gayle, are living in Pittsburgh following his graduation from a Massachusetts seminary.

Son Steve planned a movie career until it was suggested he get some experience in a Broadway show-a 1950s-spoof musical "Grease."

"That ended his career in the movies," Mrs. Ford said. "He is now working for a veterinarian and teaching riding in Newport, Calif."

Ford has not ruled out running for the presidency in 1980, but Mrs. Ford has made no secret of the fact that she'd rather her husband remain retired from active political life when the Fords move into their $600,000 "dream house" in Palm Springs, Calif., next spring.